

THE COMMON LOT.¹

XVI.

EVERETT WHEELER could hardly be reckoned as a man of sentiment. Yet in the matter of selecting an architect for the new school he stood out persistently against the wishes of Pemberton and Judge Phillips, with but one sentimental argument, — the Powers Jackson trustees must give the commission for building the great school to the nephew of the founder, without holding a competitive trial of any sort.

"It's only square," he insisted. "Jackson was disappointed about the will. He had some grounds for feeling badly used, too. He might have made us a good deal of trouble at the time, and he did n't."

"I suppose Powers would think it queer to pass him by," Hollister admitted, "seeing he gave the boy a first-class education to be an architect. And he's a hustling, progressive fellow from all I hear. I must say I admire the way he's settled into the collar since his uncle died!"

This occurred at one of the many informal meetings of the trustees, now that the plans for the school were shaping themselves toward action. Pemberton, with whom the others happened to be taking their luncheon, glanced sharply at Wheeler. Although not given to suspecting his neighbors of indirect motives, Pemberton understood Wheeler well enough to know that when the lawyer fell back upon sentiment there must be another motive in the background. He had not forgotten Mrs. Hart's sudden interest in this question, which he had attributed to an unwise zeal in behalf of her husband. It occurred to him now that he had once heard in past years of Everett Wheeler's devotion to Nellie Spellman.

"I can't see that it follows that we should put this plum into his mouth!" the judge exclaimed testily. "If Powers had wanted to give the chap any more money, he would have left it to him. Frankly, I don't like the fellow. He's too smooth, too easy with all the world."

"We know why you are down on him," Wheeler remarked, with a smile. "He did let your sister-in-law in for a good deal."

"Well, it is n't just that! Of course he was beginning then, and wanted to make his first job as big as possible, — that's natural enough. And I guess Louise — Well it's her affair! She manages her own property, and I would n't let her spend any of the children's money. But I don't like Hart's methods. Raymond was telling me the other day how he worked him for that railroad job, — through — through a woman. I suppose it's all right; the man must get business where he can. It's hard for youngsters to make a living these days. But to get a woman to pull off a thing like that for you! And Raymond told me they had to drop him, too, — he did n't do the work economically, or something of the sort."

"I guess there's another story to that," Wheeler answered patiently. "Jack was n't willing to let Bushfield make all he wanted to off the contracts. I happen to know that. And I don't see why you should have it in for him because he got a lady to say a good word for him with Raymond. You know well enough that pretty nearly all the big commissions for public buildings in this city have gone by favor, — family or social or political pull. It's got to be so. You're bound to think that the man you know is bigger than the other fellow you don't know!"

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"The proper way in the case of all public buildings is to hold an open competition," Pemberton remarked stiffly.

"Well, we won't argue that question. But this is a special case. Hart knows more of our plans than any other architect, naturally, and he can give us pretty much all his attention. He'll push the work faster."

"We can wait," Pemberton objected. "There is no need for undue haste."

"No, no, John!" Judge Phillips protested. "I am getting to be an old man. I want to see the school started and feel that my duty's done. We've thrashed this out long enough. Let us take Hart and be done with it."

Pemberton had been added to their number at the suggestion of the judge, because of his well-known public spirit and his interest in educational and philanthropic enterprises. He had undertaken his duties with his accustomed energy and conscientiousness, and at times wearied even the judge with his scruples. The others had rather hazy ideas as to the exact form, educationally, that the large fund in their charge should assume. Wheeler concerned himself mainly with the financial side of the trust. Hollister, who had got his education in a country school, and Judge Phillips, who was a graduate of a small college, merely insisted that the school should be "practical," with "no nonsense." After they had rejected the plan of handing over the bequest to a university, Pemberton had formed the idea of founding a technological school, modeled after certain famous eastern institutions. This conception Helen had disturbed by her talk with him, in which she had vigorously presented the founder's ideas on education.

In his perplexity Pemberton had gone east to see the president of a university, of which he was one of the trustees, and there he had met one of the professors in the scientific department, one Dr. Everest, a clever organ-

izer of educational enterprises. Dr. Everest did not find it difficult to convince Mr. Pemberton that his dilemma was an imaginary one, that all warring ideals of education might be easily "harmonized" by a little judicious "adjustment." There should be some domestic science for the girls, manual training combined with technical and commercial courses for the boys, and all would be right, especially if the proper man were employed to mix these ingredients. In brief, the doctor came to Chicago at the invitation of the trustees, looked over the ground, and spoke at several public dinners on the "ideals of modern education." His eloquent denunciation of a "mediæval" education, his plea for a business education for a business people, his alert air and urbane manners convinced the trustees that they had found a treasure. Dr. Everest was invited to become the head of the new school, which was to be called the JACKSON INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE.

When Everett Wheeler had finally obtained the consent of his associates to ask the architect to meet the trustees and the new director and discuss plans for the building, the lawyer was so pleased that he broke an engagement for dinner, and took the train to Forest Park instead. He might have telephoned the architect, but, sluggish as he was temperamentally, he had long promised himself the pleasure of telling Helen personally the good news. Of late she had not seemed wholly happy, and he supposed that there were money troubles, which would now be relieved.

He found a number of people on the veranda of the Harts' house, and sat down patiently to wait. It had been a warm day, and the men and women were lounging comfortably on the grass mats, gossiping and enjoying the cool air from the lake. Jackson was in high spirits, telling Irish stories, a social gift which he had cultivated. Wheeler found himself near Venetia Phillips,

who was nursing a sprained elbow, the result of being pitched against a fence by a vicious horse.

"Why don't you try your charms on Helen?" she asked Wheeler peevishly. "She's been out of sorts all this summer. When you see the solemn way good married women take their happiness, it does n't encourage you to try your luck. I wonder if she and Jackie scrap. She looks as if she had a very dull life."

"What's the matter?"

"I can't make out exactly. Unsatisfied aspirations, or something of the sort. I should guess that our Jackson does n't come up to specifications. She sighs for the larger world. Did you ever meet a chap who used to give lessons in binding paper books? That was a couple of years ago, when we were all trying to do something with our hands, reviving the arts and crafts. His name was Vleck. He was a poor, thin little man, with a wife dying from consumption or something of the sort. He had hard luck written all up and down him. I have always thought Helen wanted to run away with Mr. Vleck, but could n't get up her courage. They used to talk socialism and anarchy and strikes until the air was red. It was the biggest fun to see him and Jackson get together. Jack would offer him a cigar, — the bad kind he keeps for the foremen on his buildings. Vleck would turn him down, and then Helen would ask the bookbinder to luncheon or dinner, and that would give Jack a fit. But Vleck would n't stay. He had ideas about the masses not mixing with the classes until the millennium comes. Helen would argue with him, but it was no use. He thought nothing was on the square. Well, one day he got huffy about something Jack said, and went off and never turned up again. Helen tried to find him; I don't think she ever got over it. I believe that Vleck was the man for her. She is an unsatisfied soul!

I am going, and you had better try to cheer her up."

It was beyond the lawyer's power, however, to penetrate Helen's mood. She seemed curiously removed from the scene. The banter and talk of the people on the veranda passed over her unheeded; her eyes rested dreamily on the trees, among which the summer twilight was stealing. To rouse her attention Wheeler brought forth his news.

"I came out here to tell you something, Nell," he said.

"What is it?" she asked indifferently.

"Jack is going to build the school!"

He looked at her closely. She gave a little start, as though his words brought her back to the present, but she said nothing.

"I've just argued them into it. They wanted a public competition, or something of the kind."

"Why don't they have a competition?" she asked quickly.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should they? Is n't Jack the old man's nephew?"

She made no reply, and he said nothing more, dampened by the way she took his splendid news. In a little while the others left, and they had dinner. Wheeler expected Helen would tell her husband of the decision, but she seemed to have forgotten it. So, finally, he was forced to repeat his news. He dropped it casually and coldly: —

"Well, Jack, we're getting that school business cleared up. Can you meet the trustees and the doctor at my office some day this week?"

Jackson bubbled over with glee.

"Hoorah!" he shouted. "Good for you, Everett. We must have up some champagne."

The lawyer, watching Helen's impassive face, felt inclined to moderate Jackson's enthusiasm.

"Of course, nothing's settled as to the commission. You'll be asked to

prepare sketches after you have consulted with Dr. Everest. That's all."

That was enough for the architect. He thought that he could satisfy the director, and if he succeeded with him the rest of the way was clear. When the champagne came, he pressed his thanks on his cousin.

"It's awfully good of you, Everett, all the trouble you have taken for me in this. You'll have to let me build that camp in the Adirondacks this fall. My heavens," he went on, too excited to be cautious, "you don't know what a load it takes off my shoulders! I can feel myself free once more. It's a big thing, the first big thing that's come my way since I began. How much do the trustees mean to put into the building?"

"That depends," the lawyer answered cautiously. "It will be over half a million, anyway, I should suppose."

"It's a great opportunity!" the architect exclaimed, conscious that the more elevated and ideal aspects of the subject were slipping out of sight. "It does n't come every day, the chance to build a monument like the school!"

"You're quite right," Wheeler assented.

In his excitement, Hart left his seat and began to pace the floor, his hands twisting his napkin nervously. Helen was watching the bubbles break in her champagne glass. Her face had remained utterly blank, although she seemed to be listening to her husband. Perhaps, thought the lawyer, she did not realize what this meant. So he remarked deliberately:—

"It's a big commission, fast enough, if you get it. I don't know of another young fellow in your business in this city who's had the same chance to make his reputation."

Even this did not rouse the wife to speech. A flush stole over her face, but her eyes remained buried in the champagne-glass, which she twirled

gently between her fingers, thus keeping up the effervescence. Jackson was jubilant enough for two.

"Dr. Everest and I were talking about the site the other day," he said. "You have only two blocks. There should be four, at least. You must give dignity to the main building by some kind of approach. It should be done in stone, if possible. But if that's too costly, we might try white terra cotta. You can get very good effects in that."

"You may find the judge and Pemberton pretty stubborn on matters of detail," Wheeler remarked cautiously.

But the architect flirted his napkin buoyantly. He had dealt with building committees before, and he had found that trustees usually took their duties lightly.

"Well, what do you think of it, Nell?" the lawyer asked finally.

"Oh! I?" She looked up blankly from the glass of wine. "It is a great chance, of course."

Soon after this the lawyer left to get his train for the city, and Jackson walked to the station with him. When he returned he found Helen still sitting at the empty table. His eyes were aflame with the golden light of opportunity. He put his hand over his wife's shoulder and pressed her cheek affectionately.

"It's great, is n't it, Nell?" he said.

She looked into his face with a wistful smile. The good news had changed him wonderfully in this brief hour, erasing already some lines from his face. She divined, then, that his nature was not one that grew in the storms of life, but needed, rather, the warmth of prosperity.

"It's great, is n't it?" he repeated, desiring to savor the good fortune with her.

"Yes, Francis," she replied, and added almost pleadingly, "and you must do it greatly!"

"Of course!" he assented cheerily.

XVII.

About six miles from the centre of the city on the South Side, not far from the lake, might be seen the foundations and first two stories of a considerable building that had been abandoned for several years. It was to have been a hotel, but its promoters, who were small capitalists from another state, had been caught in the real estate disasters of '93. Litigation ensuing among themselves, nothing had ever been done with the property. The unfinished walls, standing at the corner of one of the boulevards and overlooking a large park, were a landmark in the neighborhood. A thick growth of weeds partially covered the loose piles of brick and stone that littered the ground and filled the hollow shell. Desolate, speedily disintegrating, the ruin stood there, four windowless walls, a figure of unsubstantial and abortive enterprise!

Hart had often passed the ruin when his business called him to that part of the city. One day this summer, as he was driving through the park with Graves on his way to inspect the last string of cheap stone houses that the contractor had built, Graves called his attention to the place.

"That pile must be pretty well covered with tax-liens," the contractor observed, as they turned into the boulevard, and approached the ruin. "It's a sightly piece of property, too, and the right spot for a family hotel."

"Who are the owners?" Hart asked.

"A lot of little fellers out in Omaha; they got to fightin' among themselves. It might be had cheap. Let's go over and take a look at the place."

He hitched his horse to a tree in front of the ruin, and the two men pushed their way through the weeds and rubbish into the cellar.

"Pretty solid foundations," the contractor observed, picking at a piece of mortar with the blade of his clasp knife.

"There's most enough stone lying around here to trim the whole building. What do you think of the walls? Has the frost eat into 'em much?"

They scrambled in and out among the piers and first story walls, testing the mortar, scraping away the weeds here and there to get a closer view of the joints. The upper courses of the brick had been left exposed to the weather and were obviously crumbling. The architect thought that the outer walls might have to be rebuilt from the foundations. But the contractor observed that it would be sufficient to rip off half a dozen courses of the masonry.

"Those fellers thought they were going to have a jim-dandy Waldorf, judging from the amount of stone they were putting in!" the contractor remarked, as they climbed into the buggy and resumed their way to the city. "I guess it would n't take much to buy up the tax-rights. The land and material would be worth it."

"I should say so," the architect assented, seeing how the matter was shaping itself in his companion's mind.

"Those foundations would take a pretty big building, eight or ten stories."

"Easily."

They talked it over on their way back to the city. The contractor had already formed a plan for utilizing the property. He had in mind the organization of a construction company, which would pay him for building the hotel with its bonds, and give him a large bonus of stock besides. The architect was familiar with that method of operation. The hotel when finished would be rented to another company for operation, and by that time the contractor and his friends would have disposed of their stock and bonds.

"You must let me in on this," the architect said boldly, as they neared the city. "I'm getting sick of playing your man Friday, and taking what you give me, Graves!"

"There's no reason why you should n't make something, too," the contractor answered readily. "You might interest some of your rich friends in the scheme, and get a block of stock for yourself."

Hart had a pressing need of ready money rather than such dubious promoter's profits. Rainbow and Harris had not pushed him to pay the balance against him on their books, but their leniency would not extend beyond the first of the month. Then, if he could not get the money in some other way, he should have to go to his mother, or take the little legacy that his uncle had left Helen. That very day he had had it in mind to ask the contractor to let him have twelve thousand dollars on his note, which would get him out of his immediate difficulties. He could pay it with the first return from the school commission, on which he was reckoning.

But when the contractor described the hotel project, he resolved to wait a little longer, in the hope that somehow he might make more than enough to pay his debts. What he needed was some capital. It was to get capital that he had ventured with the broker. Why had he not had the wit to see the chance that lay in that old ruin? For the last five years many men that he knew had been making fortunes, while he was working hard for precarious wages. No matter what he might earn in his profession, he could never feel at ease, have enough for his ambitions. He must have capital,—money that would breed money independently of his exertions. Latterly his mind had turned much about this one desire.

"You'll want me to draw the plans for the hotel, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes, you might get up some sketches for a ten-story building right away,—something to show the men I want to interest in the scheme," Graves answered quickly. "When you have it ready, come around and we'll see if we can't fix up some kind of deal."

It was evident that the contractor had gone much farther in the hotel matter than he had told Hart.

Then came the word from Everett that the trustees were ready to ask him for preliminary sketches for the school, and almost at the same time he received a polite note from the brokers calling his attention to his debt. He went at once to Graves's office, and asked the contractor for the loan, saying that he was to have the school and should be put to extraordinary expenses in his office for the next few months. The contractor let him have the money readily enough on his personal note. Graves did not speak of the hotel, and for the time the school had driven all else from the architect's mind. He was kept busy these weeks by consultations with the trustees and the director of the school, getting their ideas about the building. One morning the newspapers had an item, saying that "F. J. Hart, the prominent young architect, had received the commission for building the Jackson Institute, and was engaged in drawing plans for a magnificent structure, which in luxury and completeness would outrank any similar institution in the country." Before noon Hart received a curt command from Judge Phillips to call at his office, and foreseeing trouble with the trustees about the newspaper paragraph, he went scowling into the draughting-room.

"Some of you boys must have been talking loose about what's going on in this office," he said accusingly.

"The Tribune man had the story straight enough when he came in here," Cook replied in defense. "He must have got it from some one who knew what he was talking about."

Hart went over to the judge's office and tried to explain matters to the old gentleman, who, beside having a great dislike of "newspaper talk," felt that the trustees were being deliberately coerced into giving their commission to

this pushing young man. The architect was forced to swallow some peppery remarks about indelicate methods of securing business. When he left the judge, who was only half convinced of his sincerity, he went to see Graves, and vented his irritation on the contractor.

"You let things leak out of this office. You got me into hot water by giving out that story about the school."

"How so? It's straight, ain't it? You've got the building? You said so the other day when you came in here to borrow that money."

"Well, it has n't been formally settled. They are touchy enough about their old job. They've asked me to prepare the first sketches, — that's all so far."

"Oh! That's all, is it?" the contractor remarked coldly. "I thought you had the job in your inside pocket from the way you talked the other day."

Hart's face reddened as he stammered, —

"It's all right. They are sure to take me, only they are a little slow, and I don't want to seem to force them."

Graves continued to examine the man before him with his shrewd little eyes, and Hart realized that the contractor had given the news to the papers for the precise purpose of finding out where the trustees stood.

"Well, when you get ready to build, I expect we shall be doing a good deal of business together," Graves remarked tentatively.

The architect moved nervously in his chair.

"We shall want you to bid, of course. I don't know yet whether the trustees mean to let the contracts as a whole."

"They'll do pretty much what you say, won't they? Ain't one of them your cousin?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want that contract. Can't you fix it so's I can get it?"

Hart knew altogether too well what the contractor meant. An architect

has it in his power to draw his specifications in such a manner that only a few favored contractors will dare to bid. If outsiders venture to bid for the work, they cannot with safety go low enough to get the contract. In the case of a large building this is a more difficult manœuvre to manage than with less important work. Yet even with a building like the school, contractors would be chary of bidding against a man who was as closely identified with the architect as Graves was with Hart.

"They say now," Hart protested, "that nobody else gets a show in my office."

"I don't believe you see what there might be in this for you, Mr. Hart!" the contractor persisted.

A stenographer interrupted them at that point, and the architect had a few moments to think. He knew better than any one else the devious methods of the contractor, and it occurred to him that this would be a good time to sever his close connection with the Graves Construction Company. He would, of course, allow Graves to bid on the school contracts, but would show him no favors. Yet the contractor's last words made him reflect. There was the hotel with its unknown possibilities of large returns. Moreover, the Graves Construction Company was no longer the weak enterprise that it had been five years before. Graves had made a great deal of money these last prosperous years, and his "corporation" was one of the largest of its kind in the city. It would be stupid to break with the man altogether.

"Come, this ain't quiet enough here! Let's step over to Burke's and talk it out," the contractor suggested, looking up from the papers the stenographer had brought in.

So the two men went across the street to Burke's, which was a quiet sort of drinking-place, frequented by the better class of sporting men. In the rear there were a number of little rooms,

where whispered conversations intended for but two pairs of ears were often held. When the negro attendant had wiped the mahogany table and brought them their whiskey, Graves began: —

“Mr. Hart, I ’m going to give you the chance of your life to make a lump of money, sure and quick, and no gold-brick proposition, either.”

Graves poured himself a drink, and meditatively twirled the small glass between his fat fingers.

“You do the right thing by me in this school job, and I ’ll see that you are properly fixed on the hotel scheme.”

The details of the plan came cautiously and slowly from the contractor, while Hart listened in a non-committal frame of mind. The thing proposed was really very simple. The architect was to draw the school specifications so that only a few firms would bid, and of these only one or two would be genuine competitors. The contractor would see to it that there were enough bidders at approximately his own figure to prevent suspicion on the part of the trustees. In return for this favor, Graves offered a large block of stock in the hotel company, “for the plans of the hotel,” which he was ready to guarantee would be worth a certain sum.

Of course there was an unspecified item in the transaction, which was perfectly obvious to the architect. If the contractor was ready to make these terms in order to obtain the school, there must be enough in the job above the legitimate profit on the contract to make it well worth his while. The architect saw, less sharply, that this extra profit would be made with his professional connivance. It would be impossible to get the trustees to accept bids so high that the contractor could reap his profit and still do the work up to the specifications. It would be necessary to specify needlessly elaborate steel work, cut stone, and interior finish, with the understanding that the Graves Company would not be forced to live up

to these gilt-edged specifications. It might be necessary, even, to prepare two sets of specifications for the more important parts of the contract, — one for the bidding, and one for the use of the sub-contractors.

Hart smoked and listened, while Graves, having finished the outline of his plan, spoke of the profit to the architect.

“If you want, I ’ll agree to take the hotel stock off your hands at par from time to time as the two buildings go up. You can figure out now what you ’ll make! It will not be far from seventy thousand dollars, what with your commissions and the stock. And I ’ll guarantee, Hart, that you ’ll have no trouble. That drunken Dutchman can work over any details that have to be fixed, — my own expense. Nothing need go through your office that ain’t first-class and regular.”

The plan seemed perfectly simple, and the architect’s imagination fastened on the big bait which the contractor held out. Graves repeated slowly in his thick tones: —

“A year, or say eighteen months, from now, you ’ll have about seventy-five thousand dollars in the bank.”

That would be capital! The lack of capital had tripped him at every turn. With that amount of money, he could plant his feet firmly on the earth and prepare to spring still higher.

“Of course,” Graves continued, “you ’d stand by me, — help me out with the trustees if there was any kick.”

In other words, for the term of a year or eighteen months, he would be this contractor’s creature. But the architect was thinking of something else. . . .

The line between what is honest and dishonest in business is a difficult one to plot. From generation to generation our standards alter in the business world as elsewhere, and to-day men will do unblushingly, and with the approval of their fellows, that which in another gen-

eration will, doubtless, be a penitentiary offense. Business is warfare, and whatever men may say on Sundays, the hardy man of business will condone a thrifty sin of competition sooner than any other sin. Every one of the fighters in the battle knows how hard it is to make a dollar honestly or dishonestly, and he prefers to call certain acts "indicate" or "unprofessional," rather than dishonest.

Of such "unprofessional" conduct Hart had been guilty a number of times, and the matter had not troubled him greatly. But this arrangement, which the contractor was urging, was of more positive stripe. It involved outright rascality, which, if it became known in the community, might ruin his professional standing for life. He would be taking a great risk to grasp that promised lump of money. While Graves talked in his thick, guttural tones, Hart was weighing this risk. The whiskey that he had been drinking had not obscured his vision in the least, although it shed a rosier glow over the desired capital. It must be admitted that the architect gave little thought to the trustees or to his uncle's bequest. It would have pleased him, if he had considered it at all, to make a good round hole in his uncle's millions, of which the old man had deprived him. And as for the trustees, they were shrewd men of the world, quite able to take care of themselves.

But, instinctively, he recoiled from the act. He would much prefer a clean, honorable, "high-class" career. If he could have secured money enough to satisfy his ambitions without resort to such knavery as this, it would have been much pleasanter. But in one way or another he must make money, and make it more rapidly and more abundantly than he had been doing. That was success! When he had come to this point, he had already consented with himself. . . .

They had been sitting there nearly
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two hours, but latterly little had been said. The contractor was patient and diplomatic. Finally he asked, "Well, Hart, what do you say?"

Hart lighted another cigar before replying, and then replied deliberately, "I will think over what you say. I understand that the stock is given me for my commission on the hotel, and will be worth a fixed sum?"

"That's it!"

Then they went out into the street without further words. Hart returned to his office, examined his mail, wrapped up his first sketches for the school, and set out for the train. The deal with Graves unconsciously filled his thoughts and made him feel strange to himself. He thought less of the practical detail of the transaction than of certain specious considerations concerning the morality of what he was going to do.

Business was war, he said to himself again and again, and in this war only the little fellows had to be strictly honest. The big ones, those that governed the world, stole, lied, cheated their fellows openly in the market. The Bushfields took their rake-off; the Rainbows were the financial pimps, who fattened on the vices of the great industrial leaders. Colonel Raymond might discharge a man on the C. R. & N. who stole fifty cents or was seen to enter a bucket shop, but in the reorganization of the Michigan Northern ten years previously, he and his friends had pocketed several millions of dollars, and had won the lawsuits brought against them by the defrauded stockholders.

It was a world of graft, the architect judged cynically. Old Powers Jackson, it was said in Chicago, would cheat the glass eye out of his best friend in a deal. He, too, would follow in the path of the strong, and take what was within his reach. He would climb hardily to the top, and then who cared? That gospel of strenuous effort, which our statesmen and orators are so fond of shouting forth, has its followers in

the little Jackson Harts. Only, in putting forth their strong right arms, they often thrust them into their neighbors' pockets! And the irresponsible great ones, who have emerged beyond the reign of law, have their disciples in all the strata of society, — down, down to the boy who plays the races with the cash in his employer's till.

The architect went home to his wife and children with the honest love that he bore them. If they had entered his mind in connection with this day's experience, he would have believed that largely for their sakes, for their advancement in the social scheme of things, he had engaged upon a toilsome and disagreeable task. For he did not like slippery ways.

XVIII.

Hart's design for the school had been accepted by the trustees, and the plans were placed on exhibition in the Art Institute. Little knots of people — students, draughtsmen, and young architects — gathered in the room on the second floor where the elevations had been hung, and had their say about the plans. Occasionally a few older men and women, interested in the nobler parts of civic life, drifted into the room, having stolen some moments from a busy day to see what the architect had done with his great opportunity.

"Gee! Ain't it a hummer, now!" exclaimed one of Wright's men, who had known Hart in the old days. "He let himself out this time, sure. It will cover most two blocks."

"The main part of the design is straight from the Hotel de Ville," one of the young architects objected disdainfully. He and his friends thought there were many better architects in the city than F. Jackson Hart, and grumbled accordingly. "I bet I could find every line in the design from some

French thing or other. Hart's an awful thief: he can't think for himself."

"Where is the purpose of the structure expressed?" another demanded. "It would do just as well for the administration building of a fair as for a school!" . . .

"A voluptuous and ornamental design; the space is wickedly wasted in mere display. The money that ought to go into the school itself will be eaten up in this great, flaunting building that will cover all the land." . . .

"What have I been telling you? Chicago ain't a village any more. A few buildings like this and the university ones, and the world will begin to see what we are doing out here!"

"What's the dome for?" . . .

"I say the people should have the best there is." . . .

"Pull, pull, — that's what's written all over this plan!"

Even Wright, who happened to be in the city, stepped into the Institute to look at the plans. He studied them closely for a few minutes, and then, with a smile on his face, moved off.

Hart had, indeed, "let himself out." It was to be a master work, and put the architect into the higher ranks of his profession. For the first time he had felt perfectly free to create. As often happens, when the artist comes to this desired point and looks into his soul, he finds nothing there. The design was splendid, in a sense, — very large and imposing: an imperial flight of steps, which fastened the spectator's eye; a lofty dome; and two sweeping wings to support the central mass. Nevertheless, the architect had not escaped from his training: it was another one of the Beaux Arts exercises that Wright used to "trim." Years hence the expert would assign it to its proper place in the imitative period of our arts as surely as the literary expert has already placed there the poet Longfellow. Though Hart had learned much in the

past six years, it had been chiefly in the mechanics of his art: he was a cleverer architect, but a more wooden artist. The years he had spent in the workshop of the great city had deadened his sense of beauty. The clamor and excitement and gross delight of living had numbed his sense of the fine, the noble, the restrained. He had never had time to think, only to contrive, and facility had supplied the want of ideas. Thus he had forgotten Beauty, and managed to live without that constant inner vision of her which deadens bodily hunger and feeds the soul of the artist.

So Wright read the dead soul in the ambitious design.

Mrs. Phillips came rustling in with friends, to whom she exhibited the plans with an air of ownership in the architect.

"It's the cleverest thing that has been done in this city; every one says so. I tell Harrison that he has me to thank for this. It was a case of poetic justice, too. You know the story? One forgets so easily here; it's hard to remember who died last month! Why, the old man Jackson left pretty nearly every cent of his money to found this school. I think he was crazy, and I should have fought the will if I had been a relative. At any rate, it was a nasty joke on this Mr. Hart, who was his nephew, and every one thought would be his heir.

"But he has made such a plucky fight, got the respect of every one, gone right along and made a splendid success in his profession. He married foolishly, too. Poor girl, not a cent, and not the kind to help him one bit, you know, — no style, can't say a word for herself. She's done a good deal to keep him back, but he has managed to survive that. I wonder he has n't broken with her. I do, really! They have n't a thing in common. They had a pleasant home out in the Park, you know, and a good position, — every one

knew them there. And what do you think? She made him give up his house and come into town to live! The Park was too far away from her friends, or something of the sort. Wanted to educate her children in the city. I believe it was jealousy of him. He was popular and she was n't. No woman will stand that sort of thing, of course.

"So now they have taken a house on Scott Street, — a little, uncomfortable box, the kind of place that is all hall and dining-room. Of course they don't have to live like that; he's making money. But she says she does n't want to be bothered, — has ideas about simple living. The trouble is, she has n't any ambition, and he's brimful of it. He could get anywhere, if it were n't for her. It's a shame! I don't believe she half appreciates even this. Is n't it splendid? He has such large ideas!

"Venetia is thick with her, of course. You might know she would be! It's through Mrs. Hart she meets those queer, tacky people. I tell you, the woman counts much more than the man when it comes to making your way in the world; don't you think so?" . . .

And with further words of praise for the plans and commiseration for the architect, the widow wandered into the next room with her friends, then descended to her carriage, dismissing art and life together.

Helen made a point of taking the boys to see their father's work, and explained carefully to them what it all meant. They followed her open-eyed, tracing with their little fingers the main features of the design as she pointed them out, and saying over the hard names. It was there Venetia Phillips found her, seated before the large sketch of the south elevation, dreaming, while the boys, their lesson finished, had slipped into the next room to look at the pictures.

"Have you seen my mother?" she asked, seating herself beside Helen.

... "Well, well, our Jackie has done himself proud this time, has n't he? He's a little given to the splurge, don't you think?"

Helen did not answer. She did not like to admit even to herself that her husband's greatest effort was a failure. Yet she was a terribly honest woman, and there was no glow in her heart. Indeed, the school and all about it had become unpleasant to her, covered as it was with sordid memories of her husband's efforts to get the work. Lately there had been added to these the almost daily bickerings with the trustees, which her husband reported. The plans had not been accepted easily!

"All the same, Jack's got some good advertising out of it," Venetia continued, noticing Helen's silence. "The newspapers are throwing him polite remarks, I see. But I want to talk to you about something else. Mamma has been losing a lot of money; bad investments made in boom times; sure things, you know, like copper and steel. She's very much pressed, and she wants to put my money in to save some of the things. Uncle Harry is raging, and asks me to promise him not to let her have a cent. Stanwood has come home, — there does n't seem to be anything else for him! It's all rather nasty. I don't know what to do: it seems low to hold your mother up in her second youth. And yet the pace Mrs. Phillips keeps would finish my money pretty soon. It's a pity Mrs. Raymond won't die and give mother a chance to make a good finish!"

"Venetia!"

"What's the harm in my saying what all the world that knows us is saying? It's been a ten years' piece of gossip. I feel sorry for her, too. It must be rough to get along in life and see you have muckered your game. . . . Do you know, I am terribly tempted to let her have the money, all of it, and skip out. Perhaps some of these days you'll read a little paragraph in the

morning paper, — 'Mysterious Disappearance of a Well-Known Young Society Woman!' Would n't that be real sport? Just to drop out of everything, and take to the road!"

"What would you do?"

"Anything, everything, — make a living. Don't you think I could do that?" She embroidered this theme fancifully for a time, and then lapsed into silence. Finally she burst forth again, "Good Lord, why can't we get hold of life before it's too late? It's going on all around us, — big, and rich, and full of blood. And folks like me sit on the bank, eating a picnic lunch."

"Perhaps," mused Helen, "it would be different if one had to earn the lunch."

"Who knows? Will you try it? Will you cut loose from Jackie?"

As they descended the broad flight of steps to the street, Venetia laid her hand on the older woman's arm.

"Tell Jackie we are all proud of him. Mamma brags of him daily. . . . And look out for the paragraph in the paper. They'd give me a paragraph, don't you think?"

The winter twilight had descended upon the murky city, filling the long vistas of the cross streets with a veil of mystery. The roar of the place mounted to the clouds above, which seemed to reverberate with the respirations of the Titan beneath. Here in the heart of the city, life clamored with a more direct note than in any other city of the world. Men were struggling fiercely for their desires, and their cries ascended to the dull heavens.

Helen walked home with the boys, soothed by the human contact of the streets. There was something exhilarating to her in the jostle of the throng, the men and women leaving their labors, bent homewards for the night. Her heart expanded near them, those who won their daily bread by the toil of the day.

It was quite true, what the widow had said. It was she who had willed to return to the city from the pleasant niche where she had spent her married life, desiring in the emptiness of her heart to get closer to the vast life of a human people, to feel once more the common lot of man. So she had taken the little house on Scott Street, and reduced their living to the simplest scale, declaring that she wanted her time for herself and her children. Her husband was so busy that he hardly noticed any change in her as yet. They went out less than they had gone in previous years, and sometimes he thought the people he found calling on his wife were "queer." Her interest in a new kind of education for the children bored him. She seemed to be going her own way without thought of him, and now and then he wondered what it meant. He did not like aggressive, faddish women; he wanted women to be personal and sympathetic, with a touch of "style," social tact, and a little dash. . . .

To-night he had come from his office early, and while he waited for Helen he looked about the little drawing-room disapprovingly, with a sense of aggrieved discomfort. Helen was taking to economy and simplicity too seriously. He looked at his wife closely when she came in with the boys. She seemed older, more severe in face than he had thought, than her photograph on his office desk said. When this school business was done with, they must run over to Europe for a few months' vacation, and then live differently on their return. . . .

"Nell," he said when they were alone, "it's settled at last. We let the contracts to-day!"

"For the school?" she asked. "You must be glad of that!"

Her lips, which curved so tenderly, had grown strangely firm. He put his arm over her shoulder and drew her toward him.

"Yes, it's a great relief! When

the building is finished we must have a spree, and get to be lovers once more."

"Yes, dear. . . . I've been to the Institute with the boys to have them see the plans."

"They are well spoken of. I saw Wright to-day for a moment. He stopped to congratulate me, but I could n't tell what he really thought. Well, after all the trouble with them, I got pretty much what I wanted, thanks to Everett and the doctor. Everett's been a good friend all through. The idea of the others kicking so hard because the thing was going to cost a little more than they had made up their minds to spend on the building! Pemberton thinks he knows all about architecture. It's a pity he could n't have drawn the plans himself!"

"But you saved your design."

"Yes, I've won the second round all right!"

In his joy over the thought he put his strong arms about his wife and lifted her bodily from the floor, as he had often done, boyishly, in the years before. Holding her close to him he kissed her lips and neck. She returned his kisses, but the touch of her lips was cool. She seemed limp in his arms, and he felt vaguely the want of something. She was less loving, less passionate than ever before. He missed the abandon, the utter self-forgetfulness, the rush of ecstatic emotion, which from the first moment of their love had made her for him all woman, the woman of women. . . . He let her slip from his embrace and looked at her. Was it age? Was it the penalty of living, which dampens the fire of passion and dulls desire? He was troubled, distressed for the loss of something precious that was getting beyond his reach, perhaps had gone forever.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "It's bad to be always on the dead push. Come! Let's go somewhere and have dinner and a bottle of champagne the way we used to!"

She hesitated a moment, unwilling to disappoint him.

"I can't very well to-night, Francis. I promised Morton Carr I should be home this evening. He wants me to help raise some money for his new building."

"Oh!" he said, strangely wounded in his egotism. "I remember you said something about it."

XIX.

Late in March the corner stone for the Jackson Institute was laid. It was a desolate winterish day, and the prairie wind chilled to the bone the little group of interested people seated on the platform erected for the occasion. There were brief speeches by Judge Phillips and Dr. Everest, and an address by a celebrated college president on the "new education." To Helen, who sat just behind him, in sight of the piles of excavated sand, and the dirty brick walls of the neighboring stores, the scene was scarcely in harmony with the orator's glowing generalizations. "The mighty energies of this industrial cosmopolis are answering to the call of man's ideals." . . . Cook, who was standing by the mason's windlass, caught her eye and smiled. He looked brisk and happy, and she could fancy him calling out, "Hey! Ain't this the best yet? F. J. Hart is all right."

The architect, smartly dressed for the occasion in a new frock coat and shining silk hat, stepped forward, dusted the upper surface of the great stone with a brush, and handed the judge a silver trowel. Cook pushed up to them a bucket of mortar, into which the old man thrust the trowel, and tremblingly bespattered the stone. The windlass creaked, and down came the massive block of Indiana sandstone, covering the recess into which had been stuffed some records of the present day.

Then the architect and Cook busied themselves adjusting the block, while the judge stepped backward to his seat, a look of relief coming over his red face, as if he felt that he had virtually executed the trust left him by his old friend.

As the gathering dispersed, Helen's eye fell upon a great wooden sign surmounting the workmen's shed: THE GRAVES CONSTRUCTION COMPANY — GENERAL CONTRACTORS — CHICAGO AND NEW YORK.

This was the company that had finally secured the general contract for the building. As Helen knew, there had been vexatious delays over the bids. The first figures had been very much in excess of the sum the trustees had agreed to spend upon the building. They had forced the architect to modify his plans somewhat, and to ask for bids again. Pemberton had been especially obstinate, and Hart had grumbled about him, — "Why does the old duffer chew the rag over a couple of hundred thousand, when they have over three millions anyway? It does n't come out of *his* pocket!" At last, after some wrangling, the trustees had accepted the lowest bid, though it was still considerably beyond the figure they had set. Hart regarded it as a triumph: he had saved substantially the integrity of his design, and the Graves Company got the contract.

Now all was serene. From the hour that the contract was signed, the building rose from nothingness by leaps and bounds. Graves was always rapid in his operations, and for this building he seemed to have made every preparation beforehand. The labor situation, which was still unsettled, caused him no delay. His rivals said that he had the heads of the unions on his pay rolls, and could build when other contractors were tied up by strikes. Other firms could not get their steel from the mills for months, but Graves had some mysteri-

ous way of securing his material when he wanted it. The day after the corner stone was laid he had an army of men at work; early in June the walls were up to the roof trusses; by the end of July the great edifice was completely roofed in, and the plasterers were at work.

The contracts once signed, the judge and Wheeler seemed to regard their responsibilities as over. Hollister, who had been in poor health latterly, left everything to the others. But Pemberton was the bane of the architect's life. He visited Hart's office almost daily, looked carefully at every voucher before ordering it paid, and spent long afternoons at the works. He examined the building from foundation to roof with his thrifty New England eye, and let no detail escape him, stickling over unimportant trifles, and delaying the orders for extras or alterations. The whole operation of modern building was an unknown language to him. He knew that he was ignorant of what was going on before his eyes, and his helplessness made him improperly suspicious of the architect and the contractor. Many a time he strained Hart's habitual tact. They nearly came to blows over some window-frames, which the architect had seen fit to alter without consulting the building committee.

One morning Hart found the trustee at the school in company with a stranger, who made notes in a little memorandum book. Pemberton nodded curtly to the architect, and, as he was preparing to leave, remarked casually:—

"This is Mr. Trimble, Mr. Hart. Mr. Trimble is an engineer, who has done work for me from time to time. He will look through the works and make a report. Mr. Trimble will not interfere with you in any way, Mr. Hart. He will report to me."

The architect's face grew white with suppressed rage, and his lips trembled as he answered:—

"What is your reason for taking this

step, Mr. Pemberton? When I was given the commission, nothing was said about having a superintendent. If there is to be one, he should report to me. As you know quite well, I have devoted my entire time to this building, and given up other work in order that I might be out here every day. I shall speak to the other trustees about this, and I'll not stand the insult, Mr. Pemberton!"

"Tut, tut, no insult, Mr. Hart. You must know that it's quite usual in work of this magnitude for the owners to have their representative on the works. There will be no interference with you or the contractor, if the work goes right."

The architect swallowed his anger for the time, answering sulkily, "Mr. Graves will take no orders except from me, of course. The contracts are so drawn."

"Eh!" Pemberton exclaimed. "I hope there will be no occasion to alter that arrangement."

The architect bowed and left the building.

"Snarling, prying old fogey," he spluttered to his wife, who was waiting outside in the automobile. "Let him put in his superintendent. I guess we can give him a run for his money."

The woman's heart sank. Somehow this school, this bit of great-hearted idealism on the part of the old man she loved, had thus far stirred up a deal of mud.

Pemberton did not think it necessary to discuss with the architect his reasons for engaging Mr. Trimble as superintendent. After the contract had been let, the trustees had received a number of anonymous letters, which made charges that all had not been square in getting the bids for the building. These letters had gone into the waste-basket, as mere cowardly attacks from some disgruntled contractor. Then, one day while the building was still in the

rough, and the tile was going in, Pemberton overheard one of the laborers say to his mate,—

“Look at that stuff, now. It ain’t no good at all,” and he gave the big yellow tile a kick with his foot; “it’s nothin’ but dust. Them’s rotten bad tiles, I tell yer.”

And the other Paddy answered reflectively, scratching his elbow the while,—

“It’ll go all the same. Sure, it’s more money in his pocket. Ain’t that so, boss?”

He appealed to Pemberton, whom he took for one of the passers-by gaping idly at the building.

“What do you mean?” Pemberton demanded sharply.

“Mane? The less you pay the more you git.”

“Hist, you fule,” the other one warned, twisting his head in the direction of the boss mason.

Pemberton was not the man to take much thought of a laborer’s talk. But the words remained in his mind, and, a few weeks later, happening to meet the superintendent of a large construction company in the smoking-car of the Forest Park train, he asked the man some questions about fireproof building.

“Why did your people refuse to bid the second time?” he inquired finally.

“They saw it was just a waste of time and money,” the man replied frankly.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Why, the job was slated for Graves, — that was all. It was clear enough to us. There’s mighty little that goes out of that office except to Graves.”

“Is that so? I asked Mr. Hart particularly to have your company bid on the contracts.”

Then the man became confidential, and explained how a certain ambiguity in the wording of the specifications made it risky for a contractor to bid unless he knew just how the architect would treat him; for the contractor

might easily “get stuck” for much more than the possible profits, though bidding in perfect good faith. The man was willing enough to talk, once started on the subject, and in the course of half an hour he explained to the layman some of the chicanery of the building business.

“So you see, Mr. Pemberton, the contractor, to protect himself when he does n’t know his man, bids pretty high, and then the favored contractor can safely go a good bit lower. He has an understanding with the architect, maybe, and it all depends on how the specifications are going to be interpreted.”

And he told other things, — how some of the firms who had bid had since got parts of the general contract from the Graves Company, but on a new set of specifications.

“It’s queer,” he ended finally. “We can’t see how they’ll make a cent on the contract, unless Graves is going to rot it clear through.”

He explained what he meant by “rotting” it, — the use of cheap grades of materials and inferior labor, from the foundation stones to the cornice. In other words, the building would be a “job.”

“For those specifications called for a first-class building, awful heavy steel work and cabinet finish, and all that. If it’s built according to specifications, you’re going to have a first-class school all right!”

The result of this chance conversation was that after consultation with Judge Phillips, Pemberton sent to Boston for the engineer Trimble, whom he knew to be absolutely honest and capable.

When Hart left Pemberton, he went directly to Wheeler’s office and exploded to his cousin. On his way to the city his anger at the affront offered to him had entirely hidden the thought of the disagreeable complications that might follow. He took a high stand

with Wheeler. But the cool lawyer, after hearing his remonstrances, said placidly, —

“If Pemberton wants this man to go over the building, I don’t see how you can prevent it. And I don’t see the harm in it, myself. I suppose everything is all right. See that it is, — that’s *your* business. Pemberton would be a bad man to deal with, if he found any crooked work. You’d better look sharp after that fellow Graves.”

The architect assured his cousin that there was no need to worry on that score. But he began to foresee the dangers ahead, and felt a degree of comfort in the fact that Graves had only that week paid him in cash for the second block of his Glenmore hotel “stock.” With the previous payment, he had now thirty-five thousand dollars lying in his bank, and a large payment on the commission for the school would soon be due him.

Trouble was not long in coming! Trimble, who was a quiet little man, and looked like a bookseller’s clerk, was waiting for Hart one morning at the office of the works. He made some pointed inquiries about the plumbing specifications. There seemed to be important discrepancies between the copy of the specifications at the works and the copy which Pemberton had given him from the office of the trustees.

“Yes, a good many changes were authorized. There were good reasons for making them,” Hart responded gruffly.

The little man made no remarks; he seemed to have inquired out of curiosity. Then he asked questions about some blue prints which did not correspond with the written specifications, explaining that he had gone to the mill where the interior finish was being turned out, and had found other discrepancies in the blue prints of the woodwork. Hart answered indifferently that he would find a good many such changes, as was customary in all buildings. At

this point Graves arrived; he came into the little shanty and looked Trimble over without speaking. After the engineer had left, Graves turned to the architect, an ugly frown on his heavy face, —

“Say, is that little cuss goin’ to make trouble here?”

Hart explained briefly what had happened.

“Do you think we could fix him?” the contractor asked without further comment.

The architect noticed the “we” and sulked.

“I guess you’d better not try. He does n’t look like the kind you could fix. It’s just as well that most of the work is done, for it seems to me he means trouble.”

“All the finish and decoratin’ is comin’, ain’t it?” the contractor growled. “I tell you what, if he holds up the mill work, there’ll be all kinds of trouble. I won’t stand no nonsense from your damned trustees.” He swore out his disgust, and fumed, until Hart said: —

“Well, you’ll have to do the best you can!”

The Glenmore hotel was going up rapidly, and he thought of the twenty thousand dollars which would be coming to him on the completion of that building, — if all went well. But if there were a row, there would be no further profits for him on the hotel.

“The best I can!” Graves broke forth. “I guess you’ll have to take care of them. You’d better see your cousin and get him to call this feller off, or there’ll be trouble.”

“I have seen Wheeler,” the architect admitted.

“Well,” the contractor blustered, “if they want a fight, let ’em come on. There’ll be a strike on this building in twenty-four hours, I can tell you, and it’ll be two years before they can get their school opened!”

With this threat, the contractor left

the office, and Hart went over to the great building, which had become a thorn in his flesh these last weeks. It was not a bad piece of work, after all, as Chicago building goes, he reflected. Even if Graves had cut the work in places, and had made too much money on the steel, the stone, and here and there all over, the edifice would answer its purpose well enough, and he had no special interest in the everlasting qualities of his structures. Nothing was built to stand in this city. Life moved too swiftly for that!

For several weeks, as the end of August came near, there was a lull, while Pemberton was in the East on his vacation. The work on the school went forward as before; even the irritation of seeing Trimble's face was removed, for he had ceased to visit the works. Then, the first week in September, the storm burst. There came to the architect's office a peremptory summons to meet the trustees the next afternoon.

XX.

Powers Jackson had given the old Jackson homestead and farm in Vernon Falls to Helen, and with it a small legacy of twelve thousand dollars "as a maintenance fund." She had opened the house but once or twice since her marriage because Jackson was always too busy to take a long vacation, and she did not like to leave him. Latterly she had thought about the old man's gift a good deal, and there had been some talk of her spending the summer in Vernon Falls with the children and her mother. Instead of this, they had gone to the Shoreham Club for a few weeks, putting off the journey east till the fall.

She had never touched the legacy, leaving it in Everett Wheeler's hands, securely invested, and had paid what was needed to maintain the old place from her allowance. Now, however, a

number of repairs had accumulated, and it occurred to her one day, when she was in the city, to find out from Wheeler how much surplus she had at her disposal. They had joked a good deal about her estate, and the lawyer had scolded her for not coming to his office to examine the papers and see what he was doing with her money.

It was late in the afternoon when she had finished other, more urgent errands, and, turning into the lofty La Salle Street building, was whirled up to the twelfth floor. The middle-aged stenographer in Wheeler's office looked up on her entrance, and said that the lawyer had not left, but was engaged with some gentlemen. Would she wait? She sat down in the quiet, carpeted outer office. From this radiated several small offices, the doors of which were open. One door only was closed, and through the ground-glass panel in this she could see the dark forms of several men. Presently the stenographer pushed her papers into the drawer of her desk, and fetched her hat and coat.

"I think they must be most through," she remarked pleasantly. "You go right in when they come out."

Then she gathered up her gloves and left. Little noise came from the hall. The vast hive seemed to be deserted at this hour, and few places in the city were so quiet and lonesome as this sober law office. The murmur of voices in the inner room was the only sound of life. Gradually the voices grew louder, but Helen paid no attention to them until a man's voice, clear and shrill with exasperation, penetrated distinctly to where she sat.

"No, Wheeler!" the man almost shouted. "We won't compromise this. I won't have it covered up, white-washed. We'll go to the bottom, here and now. Let us find out what all this double-dealing means. Let us know, now, whether the work on that building is being done honestly or not, and

whether our architect is working for us or for the contractor against us."

It was Pemberton's voice, and Helen recognized it. From the first words she had grasped the arms of her chair, — a sudden clutch at her heart. She held herself rigid, while behind the door a confused murmur of men all talking at once drowned Pemberton's voice. She tried to think whether she should leave the office, but her strength had gone. She trembled in her chair. Presently Pemberton's high voice rang out again: —

"No, sir! We've given you this opportunity to explain your conduct and clear yourself. You have n't done it, sir! You try to bluster it through. There's something wrong in this business, and we shall find out what it is. Not another dollar will be paid out on your vouchers until our experts have gone through all the papers and examined every foot of the construction so far done. No, Wheeler, I will resign if you like. You asked me to join you. I was glad to do so. I considered it an honor and a duty, and I have made sacrifices for this work. But if I stay on the board this thing must be cleared up!"

Another high and angry voice answered this time: —

"You'd better not make loose charges, Mr. Pemberton, until you are in a position to prove what you say. I won't stand your talk; I'm going!"

Helen recognized her husband's voice, and she got to her feet, still clutching the chair. Then she moved forward unsteadily toward the inner office. The

handle of the door moved a little, and against the glass panel the form of a man stood out sharply.

"What are you going to do about it? Sue Graves? Or sue me? You can discharge me if you like. But I am your agent, and have full powers. Remember that! That's the way the contract is drawn. And if I back up Graves, what are you going to do about it? He's got your agent's signature for what he's done. . . . You'd better hold your temper and talk sense." . . .

"Don't threaten me, sir!" Pemberton retorted. "I have all the proof I want that you are a rascal, that you have entered into a conspiracy with this man Graves to swindle." . . .

There were sounds of a scuffle within the office, — the noise of falling chairs, the voices of excited men. Above all the clamor rose the cool tones of Wheeler, —

"Come, come, gentlemen! This is not business."

As he spoke, a weight seemed to fall against the door from the outside. The man nearest the outer office, who happened to be Judge Phillips, opened the door, and Helen fell, rather than walked, into the office, her face white, her hands stretched before her.

"Francis! Francis!" she called.

It was not her husband, however, who sprang to her aid. He was too startled to move. Wheeler, who was leaning against his desk, leaped forward, caught her, and carried her from the room.

"Nell, Nell!" he muttered. "Anything, rather than this!"

Robert Herrick.

(To be continued.)

THE YEAR IN FRANCE.

ENGLAND and France have as many reasons to be polite to each other as they have few reasons to love each other. Their commercial relations are so intimate and colossal that they can ill afford, prudentially speaking, to be at odds. Their natural and manufactured products seldom come into direct competition; on the contrary, these products are complementary to a remarkable degree. England depends largely on the farms, dairies, and vineyards of France for the daily supplies of her market and table (for butter, eggs, vegetables, fruits, and wines), and on the industries of France for various highly prized articles of luxury; while France, conversely, depends on the mines and factories of England for such staples as cotton, woolen, and rubber goods, iron, and coal. The trade between the two countries amounts in an average year to a round 2,000,000,000 francs, with a balance of upwards of 500,000,000 francs in France's favor.

The interchange of visits, last summer, between Edward VII and President Loubet, and between members of the French and English parliaments and chambers of commerce, and the arbitration treaty resulting therefrom indicate that "the powers that be" in politics and finance recognize this mutual economic dependence, and are disposed to prevent, by keeping the question of commercial advantage constantly to the fore, — alas, that no higher motive can be appealed to! — gratuitous bickerings and useless displays of bad blood. They indicate further that these same powers have succeeded in rendering acceptable to a majority of their respective compatriots this eminently practical point of view. They do not indicate that either nation has experienced a radical change of mind or heart. The two peoples continue to misunderstand and misjudge each other as

they have for centuries. They hate each other out of sheer atavism, naturally, normally, — I had almost said righteously, — and will continue to hate each other, in all human probability, to the end of time. They have merely acquiesced provisionally (in the absence of any immediate subject of disagreement) in the official attitude of politeness, without committing themselves to too close an intimacy thereby; very much as two clever and ambitious women of the world hold each other at a respectful distance, while reiterating the most amiable commonplaces and lavishing the most engaging smiles. Nothing has been pardoned or forgotten; and it will take very little to engender a dangerous irritation, to stir the ancient rancors, and destroy an *entente* which is by no means an *entente cordiale*.

The warm reception accorded King Edward by Paris should be assigned no special political significance. It was an illustration of French good nature, first of all, and, even so, was intended less for Edward, King of England, than for Edward, "the royal good fellow," — who is a prodigious favorite with the Parisians because they know he is genuinely fond of Paris, and because they have the pleasantest recollections of the escapades of his much prolonged salad days. The bulk of the Nationalists held aloof from this reception; indeed, one of the Nationalist organs went to the length of issuing just before his visit a special number devoted entirely to an indignant exposition of the reasons why this visit should be resented by the French people.

The arbitration treaty is a Platonic affair, full of loopholes, a sort of toy, child's-play treaty, not to be mentioned in the same breath, for instance, with the arbitration treaties in force between certain South American states. Its adop-